

No. 30. Christ's Command to acts of Charity <sup>(1)</sup>  
enforced.

For a Sunday School—Charity School, &c. &c.

John 15th, Chap. 12th Verse.

This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you.

These words were spoken by our Blessed Saviour to His disciples, just when he was about to undergo cruel mockings and scourgings, and to submit to death itself, "even the death of the cross." The benefit and salvation of mankind was what He alone could accomplish, and He was shortly to purchase our redemption by His death; and therefore He thought He could leave with them at His departure, no rule or direction more proper for them to follow, or more conducive to promote the chief end at which He aimed, than the love of one another. And in this love is included, as a principal branch from this root, Charity, or the relieving or doing good any other way, either to the body or soul of our neighbor.

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This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you. This we may consider, as it were, the last legacy of advice bequeathed to us by our greatest friend and benefactor, who has made it the token and badge of our christian profession, by which we are chiefly to be distinguished from others as His disciples and followers. "By this shall all men know "that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to "another."

This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you. Our Saviour not only encourages His disciples to love one another because He loved them; but he likewise instructs them how and in what degree they should love one another, and proposes His love to them as a pattern to follow in the practice of this duty. He well knew they could not be ignorant how great His love towards them was, as they had been constantly with Him; and therefore set forth His own example to them, that they should endeavor at an imitation of it. Intimating hereby that the

greatest degree of love and kindness they could shew to each other, was not more than they ought to shew. Should they be at any time in exalted stations, and be endowed with worldly riches and honors, and their poor mean brethren stand in need of their assistance, they were not to esteem such brethren beneath their notice, nor, upon account of their indigent rank and poverty, forbear shewing them acts of kindness and charity. In this Christ set them a glorious example. He was God from all eternity, "far above all principalities, or powers, or dominions." He was the fountain of all happiness. Yet for theirs and our sakes, He emptied Himself of His glory, was made of no reputation, assuming the likeness of men. Christ, says the Apostle, "tho' He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich." This He did in compassion to our infirmities, to cure the diseases of our souls, to redeem us from sin and death, and to reveal to us the whole will of His Father. Such condescension, such love, so

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great benefits received, ought to make even the greatest among us ashamed to think ourselves above doing good offices to the very meanest of our brethren. And by His action of washing His disciples feet, He has taught us an excellent lesson of humility, that we should not scruple to stoop to shew kindness to them in the meaner and inferior offices, and has made the application too himself; "ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well; for so I am. If I then your Lord and Master have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you."

But what adds the brightest lustre to our Saviour's pattern of loving us is, that He did and suffered all these things, when we were utter enemies to Him. We had fallen by our sins under the heavy displeasure of infinite Majesty and Power, and had just cause to dread the stroke of that vindictive arm we had so mightily provoked; but instead of wrath, we may, through Christ, obtain mercy; instead of an angry Judge, if it

be not our own fault, we may find God to be a most merciful Father. Thus signally glorious has the love of Christ been to mankind! and this remarkable pattern and example of His ought to teach us, that no superiority or pre-eminence we may have over our brethren, or any other consideration whatsoever, should hinder us from being kindly affectioned to them, even when they have disengaged us, and are become our enemies.

But we are to observe [which comes nearest to our present purpose] the great pity and concern our Saviour shewed to the profound ignorance, gross darkness, stubborn wills, and depraved affections of sinful men—ignorant either of the true God, or the right way of worshipping Him in spirit and in truth—not knowing their duty to God, to their neighbor, or themselves, and, by consequence, far out of the way that leads to everlasting life. They were, to use the phrase of the Apostle, self-willed and stubborn, and "that which they al-though "loved, not, that they did." And as an argument if it of the corruption of their affections, in their works they

denied God, being "abominable and disobedient, and to  
"every good work reprobate." To remove this gross ig-  
norance, and to dispel these thick mists of error, our  
Saviour, out of His abundant compassion, "brought  
"life and immortality to light through the gospel, and  
"brought them out of darkness into His marvellous  
"light." His whole life was employed in benefiting  
mankind—for "He went about doing good." His  
miracles were for the most part wrought for the healing  
the infirmities and diseases of men's bodies, and relieving  
the necessities of them; as His life was led and His  
doctrines calculated for the informing their judgments  
and curing the distempers of their souls. At one time,  
He had so great compassion on the multitude who had  
come to hear Him, that he wrought a miracle, and  
fed five thousand with five loaves and two fishes, "because  
"the place was desert." And to the doing good all  
these several ways, He was moved by inclination, be-  
cause He delighted in mercy, not compelled by necessity,  
as if there were a superior power to controul Him.

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He offered Himself willingly to do this, as He says  
expressly in the case of His approaching death—"no  
"man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of  
"myself: I have power to lay it down, and I have  
"power to take it again." And as the perfection of  
all, He did this with the deepest humility, not to re-  
ceive honor from men—for He refused to be a King;  
nor to gain their applause and praise—"He sought  
"not his own glory, but the glory of His Father who  
"had sent Him." His aim all along was to make  
good what the angels foretold of Him at His birth,  
that He would give "glory to God in the highest, that  
"He would promote peace upon earth, and shew good-  
will towards men." Vide p. 12. Now our Charity, &c.

[The pattern of the love of Christ towards men  
having been set before us as the rule and chief motive  
of our love and charity towards our brethren,

Let us see the public use and benefit of the charity  
we are met to commemorate, together with the right  
manner and measure of promoting it.

And this may be very clearly seen by such as have reaped the pleasure and advantage arising from an early and competent education, or by such as have been sensible of the inconveniences that have attended the want of it. To have youth instructed in the rudiments of Christianity—to have its follies corrected, its vanities subdued, and its passions restrained, before they grow too stubborn and unpliant, must be of signal service to any community, as having so many of its members as are so disciplined, inclinable to promote its order, peace, and unity, and having the prospect that they may be able as well as willing to be useful towards its maintenance and preservation. And especially, when the inferior and poorer part of youth is taught, who—having no guide or instructor, having neither good nor tolerable examples set them, nor improving lessons taught them, but rather the contrary—would otherwise be daily exposed to all the temptations and vices to which rude and uncultivated nature, ignorance, stubbornness, and ill examples make them very prone and liable to,

and giddily hurried away with. And these, if timely care be not taken, will so insinuate and spread themselves among such tender plants, as to take deep root with them, and will baffle all the skill that art can invent, or the pains that industry can afford to extirpate them—until they leave no other remedy for the community to apply than to root up both together. Besides, such children having first learned the rudiments of the Christian Religion, after having been “first fed with milk,” as St. Paul expresses it, not only escape the mischiefs before mentioned, but become better prepared and more willing to learn the higher doctrines of their Religion, “and to digest strong meat.” By these means they become better acquainted with the several particular branches of their duty to God, their neighbor, and themselves, and are fitter to give their consent to the reasons upon which they are founded, and to be excited by the motives made use of to encourage them to the practice of their duty. And because by woeful and sad experience it is too often found

that, in well-natured and well-disposed minds, vice is ever ready to insinuate itself by the help of sloth and idleness, after its having been banished by care and instruction, yet let it be observed, that their time is not taken up by precepts and admonition—but they are employed in labor just as much as if they received no advantages from instruction. Thus are they kept out of the road of many temptations; the seeds of rank and poisonous weeds are hindered from sowing themselves; and they are inured to a habit of that industry, which is afterwards to be their security and support. And these reasons may be sufficient, were there no other, to let every one see the great use and benefit accruing to the public, by the employing both the minds and bodies of these children, as well as the advantages resulting thereby to themselves. But more yet may be said with respect to their instruction, not interfering with their industry—that their being employed [six days in the week] in labor promotes frugality, a necessary virtue for them to learn. Now what growing hopes may

not the public conceive, what helps may the present age  
not have, and what further advantages may not the  
next reap from a youth educated in Religion and  
inured to Labor? How diffusive must this charity be,  
the influences of which are not confined to the fountain  
from which they arise, but may flow different ways  
by several channels to different and distant parts of our  
land, and may be soon conveyed into the wide ocean  
to be carried to the utmost parts of the earth? A youth  
accustomed to the hardships of labor, and trained up in  
the principles of Christianity, must make the better and  
more loyal subjects, the better friends to, and frequenters  
of our Church, the better, more dutiful, faithful and  
diligent servants; and—should it fall to their happy  
lot to govern—the kinder and more tender-hearted  
masters. And when they have not only wherewith  
to satisfy the necessities, but even to provide the comforts  
of life, they may be disposed, as well as qualified,  
to "think of the rock from whence they were hewn,"  
and to return something to keep that spring from dry-

ing up, from which they first derived their power and success.

Are we then convinced in our judgments of the benefits of this charity, let us give our utmost endeavors to promote and enlarge it—let us lend, by every convenient and requisite way, an helping hand to support and establish so good and useful a design. Let us think that cause worthy of our notice and great regard which Heaven has espoused, and concur therewith according to the power Providence has enabled us, to promote, to support, to complete so good a work. Has the love of Christ extended itself so far to us as to cause the glorious light of the Gospel to shine in this our land, so that we can see clearly how to direct our paths in the way of God's commandments, and shall we suffer these our poor and helpless neighbors to continue in darkness, ignorance, and vice, rather than Christ shall reap by their hands a part of our carnal things?]

Now our Charity with respect to God is nothing, but He has appointed the poor and fatherless as His

receivers, and He esteems what is given to them as  
lent back again to Him. How can we then neglect  
"to do good, and to communicate, when we know that  
"with such sacrifices God is well pleased?" [But then  
great care must be taken that our charity proceed from  
a right mind, for 'tis the heart God respects as well  
as the offering. After this manner Christ offered  
up Himself for us, "leaving us an example that we  
"should follow His steps."] When people are urged  
to acts of charity they alledge, that another time they  
will give, but not now; but how exceedingly frivolous is  
this? for it shews a present unwillingness, and deprives  
them of such an opportunity as they may never [per-  
haps] have again in their power. And accordingly  
Solomon gives this caution, "withhold not good from  
"them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of  
"thine hand to do it. Say not unto thy neighbor, go  
"and come again, and to-morrow I will give, when  
"thou hast it by thee." The just and particular pro-  
portions in which the persons of several ranks and con-

ditions in the world should give their alms, neither is, nor can be, determined or adjusted. But the Scripture lays down some general rules whereby every one may be able in some manner to judge for himself what is fitting for him to give in the circumstances he is in, and they are such rules as excuse very few from contributing some proportion or other. Every man's charity should be in a proportionable measure to the receipts God has afforded him. "Those that are rich in this world are charged to be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate." Thus may every one make some computation for himself in what measure to give, and may be convinced that a customary gift is not sufficient where men's circumstances are not the same; but as their stock increases, so should their charity be more and more liberal. Lastly, let us consider our Saviour's determination in the disposal of charity. "And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury; and many that were rich cast in much. And

"there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in  
"two mites, which make a farthing. And He called  
"unto Him His disciples, and saith unto them, ver=  
"ily I say unto you, that this widow hath cast in  
"more than all they which have cast into the treasury;  
"for all they did cast in of their abundance: but she  
"of her want did cast in all that she had, even all  
"her living." By this we are taught that Christ,  
"who knew what was in man," thought the poor wi=don's offering more acceptable than all those of the rich;  
not that her offering was equal to theirs—but they dif=fered in their value according to the different minds  
with which they were given. In a word, Charity  
is not a duty peculiar to those that are generally cal=led rich, but common to them with those that have  
little; so that these last as well as the rich, are  
"commanded to be merciful after their power, and  
"to do their diligence gladly to give of that little."

May God influence your hearts [in this severe  
season] [on this charitable occasion] to give to those

who cannot recompence you, that "you may be recompenced at the resurrection of the Just! [ May God influence your hearts to contribute to the well educating and nurturing these children here before you, I do not say "beyond, but according to your power." And may He "who loveth a cheerful giver" grant that, what you this day sow in charity, you may reap, at the last great day of accounts, in joy! May He, who died to reconcile you to God, reward your beneficence before men and Angels, saying, inasmuch as ye shewed kindness in instructing these little ones in the truth of my Gospel, ye did it even unto me, I consider it as done unto myself—enter therefore into the joy of your Lord! ]

Theophilus J. St. John.

Entered at Stationers' Hall.

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